

Religion in Education: Why the American Public School System Should Not Exist

An Honors Thesis (499)

by

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May 2003

Abstract

The motivation for this paper stemmed from a desire to study the contemporary problems in American public schools regarding religion and education in connection to the historical events that led to the inauguration of the current public school system, especially as differing from an original system established by the Puritans. Therefore, a large portion of this project entailed research into the development of laws and bills regarding schooling, the philosophies and writings of the founders of public education, court cases and rulings in respect to religion and education, and publications concerning modern-day disputes in public schools dealing with religious issues. The paper consists of the findings of my research, namely that the public school system – in favoring those who prefer secular (non-religious) education while discriminating against those who believe conversely – should not have been formed, and that the problems currently existing are needless consequences of placing schools under the control of the state. In order to accomplish this task, this paper begins by tracing the commencement of the common school as repercussion to disliked Puritan teachings and schooling. It also attempts to illuminate the folly in certain goals of public education – goals that could be more easily and ably met in environments (i.e. private schools) not restricted by national “establishment” laws, and to explain how current disagreements could have been avoided.

Acknowledgements

My deepest thanks are owed to Dr. Felicia Dixon for her effort and time spent in advising me throughout this thesis process. Thank you for your patience and flexibility during my change of topics, your confidence in my work, and your willingness to help me.

In the development of this paper, I sincerely thank

- my husband Jason for the initial idea and your constant encouragement;
- Matt Doublestein, Chris and Sarah James, and the Ball State Library for the lending of very valuable and helpful resources;
- and the many friends and family members who engaged in discussion with me to help my thought process.

This paper could not have been written without the love and emotional and financial support of my parents, Tracy and Kim Stevenson. Words cannot express my gratitude to you for your constant sacrifice throughout my life and for my college education.

Finally, I thank God from whom all blessings flow, including the presence of these people in my life and the ability to finish this project. Soli Deo Gloria.

Problems concerning the involvement of religion in education pervade American public schools. Court houses are full of cases dealing with issues from prayer in schools and textbook censorship to those questioning public support for private school students in areas such as transportation and textbook provision. Since the beginning of the nationally-funded system of schools, people have questioned the constitutional role of religion. May schools teach about religion? If so, can they do so objectively and comprehensively without offending anyone or misrepresenting any religion? Should schools leave out the teaching of religion altogether because of expected controversy? Historically, schools have attempted to answer these questions, only to be confronted with hostility from disagreeing parents. Most schools have chosen to leave out the teachings of obvious religions (i.e. those with a belief in a supernatural being) and have been met with accusations of teaching other, less obvious, non-supernatural religions (e.g. Secular Humanism). The problem, however, has not and cannot be solved by answering any of these questions. They are only the result of the core issue: that secular schools were made free and placed under the government's control. In the beginning of American history, the first major free public schools were Puritan Christian schools. Because many disagreed with the beliefs taught and felt that personal rights were imposed upon, publicly-funded schools became secular, "religion-free" schools. As Puritan schools should not have been governmentally-controlled, neither should have secular schools. Making these schools publicly-funded was discriminatory in that it favored (by providing free schooling for) those who believe religion should be kept out of schools and has no place in a learning institution over those who believe that religion or God is a fundamental necessity to education. Schools as public institutions should have never been formed.

When the United States as a new nation was in its infancy, schools looked much differently from what they look like today. It has been said that “a nation’s school-financing policies are a reflection of the value choices of its people, the order of priorities they establish in the allocation of the resources, and their political philosophy” (Johns 6). If this statement is true, then the values of those living in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1647 can be seen in the “old Deluder Satan Act,” which sought to inculcate religious teaching into a required classroom. This Act required townships of fifty families to hire a teacher and those of one hundred families to supply a grammar (secondary) school as well, with the distinct purpose of teaching students to live godly lives: in essence, to “delude Satan.” Whereas other colonies left education up to parents, individual religions, sects, and private teachers (Blumenfeld 18), the fact that this Act required schooling set the tradition of a community’s obligation to establish schools (Leinwand 17). The irony cannot be missed that this same tradition paved the way for public secular schooling which would allow no such (theistic) religious teaching.

Not only did the “old Deluder Satan Act” set a precedent for public “religious-free” schooling, but similar prevailing religious teachings were a direct cause of it. Puritan settlers made up the majority of inhabitants in the northern colonies and dominated the educational realm of life in that day. When speaking of Puritans as wanting to purify the Anglican Church, Dickson A. Mungazi says that “this line of thinking became the foundation on which the evolution of a theory of education was built. That theory could not be divorced from the Puritan conception of society as a form of Calvinist theology. For this reason religion exerted an important influence on education based upon the theory derived from that theology” (48). Puritan theology included the belief that people were totally depraved without the work of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, a gift of God essential for eternal life and salvation. As this

teaching gave children no credit for being inherently good, outsiders often saw it and the Puritans as too harsh (Karier 52).

This “strict” Calvinist teaching found its way to the home of Horace Mann and had an aversive influence in the future philosophy and decision making of this “Father of the Common School.” [The common school began in Massachusetts with Horace Mann as the Secretary of Education. The purpose of this institution was to provide a “common” education for everyone and thus to begin a system of public education in the United States (Karier 38). Other states followed suit later in the seventeenth century.] Mann was raised in a Calvinist church and home, and from an early age he was marked by the desire to turn away from that teaching. As recounted by Mary Tyler Peabody Mann, Horace Mann had recorded the following in a letter:

More than by toil, or by the privation of any natural taste, was the inward joy of my youth blighted by theological inculcations. . . . [The pastor of the church in Franklin] expounded all the doctrines of total depravity, election, and reprobation, and not only the eternity but the extremity of hell torments, unflinchingly and in their most terrible significance, while he rarely if ever descanted upon the joys of heaven, and never, to my recollection, upon the essential and necessary happiness of a virtuous life (Mann 13).

At the age of twelve Mann had already decided to break from Calvinism. He later wrote, “I remember the day, the hour, the place and the circumstances, as well as though the event had happened but yesterday, when in an agony of despair, I broke the spell that bound me” (Blumenfeld 165). He later turned to Unitarianism, which encourages the belief that salvation is dependent upon man’s good works rather than by grace and election of God as Calvinism teaches (Blumenfeld 62). This thought, in direct contrast to that which founded Puritan schooling, led to the ideal of progressivism that guided Mann in his leadership over the

Massachusetts schools. On the day that Mann's acceptance as Secretary of the Board of Education was communicated to the Board, he wrote in his journal that he would be sustained in that office by his "faith in the improbability of the human race, – in their accelerating improbability" (Culver 36). With the anti-Puritan/-Calvinist notion that man can constantly progress, Mann believed in having common, governmentally-funded schools which could attempt to aid Americans in the process of perfectibility.

The type of schools needed for this job, however, was necessarily secular. The First Amendment to the Constitution had now been written and did not allow the government to support, and therefore "establish," any certain religion. Thus, Massachusetts could not fund any type of school tied with the name of a church, as it had before. In addition, the idea of separation between church and state was becoming stronger. Thomas Jefferson, whose ideas anticipated that of the common school, believed that people deserved the right to free education and that secular schools could be publicly-funded because of the "wall of separation." In 1786 the Virginia Assembly accepted his *Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom*, which declared "that our civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions, any more than our opinions in physics or geometry" (Karier 35). Under Jefferson's leadership the Assembly also passed the "Statute of Religious Liberty" which stated "that to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves, is sinful and tyrannical" (Wood 27). Ironically, Jefferson and later leaders in education did not see that by establishing secular education and requiring *all* citizens to pay taxes for it, they were in their own words "sinful and tyrannical" toward those who desire education with a religious basis for themselves or for their children. Furthermore, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 declared that "religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary for good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the

means of education shall forever be encouraged” (Leinwand 26). In this case, too, the leaders did not see that the one means of proposed education kept certain people from being able to provide their own desired means of education, in some cases hindering religion, and thus, “good government and happiness of mankind.” Not comprehending that the constitutional forbiddance of state-supported religious schools did not necessitate the state support of secular schools (and that that act was actually discriminatory), thirteen of the twenty-three states had by 1820 accepted these ideas by constitutional recognition of education, supported through different kinds of taxes (Bryson and Houston 14).

The secular common schools that were being formed, then, were based on the notion of human progress: that a common education could provide education for all and thus equality among citizens. Not only were these ideas initiated by men like Jefferson and Mann, but they were encouraged by social and philosophical ideology of the day. The Great Awakening of the 1740s-60s had produced more religious pluralism, making people increasingly open to new teachings. The Enlightenment then introduced the Lockean notion that man’s nature was improvable to an indefinite extent (Karier 40). Although this idea of human progress prevailed in modern thought, it was more obvious in some cases than in others. An obvious example is seen in the work of William Maclure and Robert Owen, social reconstructivists and sons of the Scottish Enlightenment who believed in “the power of education to equalize knowledge” and who “viewed evil as a consequence of ignorance” (Karier 48). In 1825, they attempted to set up the New Harmony Experimental Communitarian Society in Indiana in order to prove these “truths.”

As evident even in the commencement of secular public schooling, human progress was a goal of public education in direct opposition to goals of earlier Christian teachings and put

children in the charge of the state to be “progressed” in the way that the state saw fit. This idea as part of “secular human eschatology” was one that “early Christian theologians and philosophers [who were] mired in the quicksand of human depravity had no propensity for” and often saw as religious in itself (Bryson and Houston 15). Contrary to a Protestant belief that “man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever” (the Westminster Shorter Catechism), and thus that man is only “progressing” when he is glorifying God more in his daily life, schools sought to advance human performance in ways that would improve the country as a whole. Since secular schools were the only schools paid for by state taxes, more students were obligated to attend because of financial reasons. The same money that could have once gone to their school of choice was now owed in taxes for public schools. Students were then made subject to the goals of the public schools, which as “social instruments shaping an emerging society of the new democracy,” had much control (Bryson and Houston 16).

Other reasons given for the beginning of public education are not in and of themselves discriminatory or the problem with education, but rather are further evidence of the desire for schools to promote human progress in their own way (and again represent desires of only some of the country). One reason given by the Center on National Educational Policy (CNEP) for the initiation of public schools was to prepare people to become responsible citizens (i.e. to make good voters and to build strong moral virtue). Thomas Jefferson had even stated in the Rockfish Gap Report that a purpose of education was “to improve, by reading, [man’s] morals and faculties” (Leinwand 36). At this time, the founders of public education probably did not foresee the problems that would result with this task, as schools have attempted to teach morality without teaching religion. They also did not understand that this goal as well as another – improving social conditions (to prevent crime) – could be as adequately and probably more easily

accomplished by privately funded schools, given their freedom from the Establishment clause. Private schools today have shown no evidence of producing more criminals or immoral or irresponsible people and have also not faced the problems that public schools have in attempting to meet these goals.

In addition to preparing responsible citizens, other reasons given by the CNEP for establishing public schools include promoting cultural unity, enhancing individual happiness, and improving national productivity and defense (Kober). Benjamin Rush stated in 1798 that “our schools, by producing one general and uniform system of education, will render the mass of the people more homogeneous” (Mungazi 79). While our country still strives for unity, the current emphasis on multiculturalism and diversity (probably as a result of the influx of immigrants in our country) implies that a system of private education in the United States – with different schools being bounded by different beliefs – would not be much unlike (or “worse” than) the current system. In regard to enhancing individual happiness, people tend to most enjoy freedom of choice. In that sense, the most practical way to promote happiness is to not bind to secular public schools those who do not agree with their teaching philosophy simply because they cannot afford anything else. Combined with the desire to increase national productivity, this disregard for some people’s happiness shows that public schools were designed to meet only the needs of some (including those of the founders), and in effect, to discriminate against others.

This partiality becomes more and more conspicuous as public schools also have the support of the judicial branch of the government, which continues to hold that levying taxes for public schools is constitutional. The Tenth Amendment states that “the powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively or to the people.” Since the Constitution makes no statement about education or

schooling, schools are obviously not required to be under federal control. Legally, then, the states have the power to run the schools. Therefore, public funding was able to be extended to high schools in 1872 by the Michigan Supreme Court (Leinwand 28), and the states could rightfully win the school funding cases of *Stuart v. School District No. 1 of Village of Kalamazoo* (1874), *Robinson v. Schenck* (1885), and *State v. Board of Commissioners of Elk County* (1899).

Although court decisions show that making education a state-funded institution is not illegal, the problem abides in the principle of doing so. First of all, although the state governments had the availability to control the schools by the Tenth Amendment, the people did as well. Therefore, it seems that if more people benefit (by having the freedom to choose between secular or different kinds of religious schooling) from attending schools run by private individuals or churches, the state powers should have happily conceded that control to the people. Some may argue here that more people actually benefited from the establishment of public schools because the poor were better able to attend. As the attendance of everyone in schools is definitely important, legislators could have put their thoughts and efforts toward implementing plans for financial aid in school choice in order that every student could choose which institution to attend. As it stands, such students can now go to school, but only to the one dictated by their place of residence.

Instead, state governments took control and private schools were scorned. It was not even until 1925 in the Oregon case of *Pierce v. The Society of Sisters of Jesus and Mary* that courts declared that states (Oregon in particular) were not required to send their children to public schools (Leinwand 48). Here they realized that it was unlawful to force people to attend schools with which they disagree, yet they found no problem taxing them for their decision. People who then chose to go elsewhere were looked upon unfavorably for it. The National

Educational Finance Project, for example, presented in their findings that they “recognize the right of parents to use their own resources to support private schools segregated by religion or economic or social class, but public funds should not be appropriated to serve private purposes under any guise” (Johns 47). They saw this human desire for choice as unfitting for the betterment of society, even though those desiring a choice make up a part of society. They also did not make the connection that the “public funds” under discussion were partly provided by those parents’ “own resources.”

Not only were certain legislators wrong in making schooling a public institution by disregarding the opinions of many people and imposing taxes upon them, but their mistake in doing so has also led to numerous problems and controversies in the public school that need not exist. Beginning as early as 1925, the Supreme Court has dealt with a plethora of cases concerning religious activity in public schools or public support for religious schools. Not to mention the time and money spent in lesser courts, the U.S. Supreme Court alone has faced thirty-four major cases dealing with these issues. This “Great Debate of the United States” has recently been one of the most predominant issues in the U.S. courts, with twelve of the thirty-four Supreme Court cases occurring from 1990 to the present (Mawdsley 10).

These court cases and the dissention leading to them exist for a variety of reasons resulting from secular schools becoming public schools. The first of these stems from confusion about the fact that public schools must remain “religion-less.” The incomprehensibility of this requirement can most evidently be seen in the ways schools have set forth religious practices that were later found unconstitutional. Even Horace Mann saw nothing wrong with implementing a time for silent Bible reading in the common school schedule (Wright 18). Multiple other examples can be seen in the annals of Supreme Court cases. In *Engel v. Vitale* (370 U.S. 421,

1962), the state of New York maintained that the practice of beginning each school day with a specific prayer was “constitutionally permissible” because of its “‘nondenominational’ generality.” The Court, however, declared this act to be in violation of the Establishment Clause, stating that “prayer in any form was clearly a religious activity” (McCarthy 70). The following year, in *Abington School District v. Schempp* (374 U.S. 203) and *Murray v. Curlett* (374 U.S. 203), the Court found unconstitutional the practice in Pennsylvania and Maryland, respectively, of Bible reading without comment each school day (McMillan 31). Similarly, the Court ruled that the posting of the Ten Commandments, the laws enforcing a moment of silence and equal treatment for creationism, and student-led prayer at graduation ceremonies and football games were all religious practices, and therefore illegal, in the cases of *Stone v. Graham* (449 U.S. 39, 1980), *Wallace v. Jaffree* (472 U.S. 38, 1985), *Edwards v. Aguillard* (482 U.S. 578, 1987), *Lee v. Weisman* (112 SCt. 2649, 1992), and *Sante Fe Independent School District v. Doe* (2000), respectively (*Legal Information Institute*).

While schools have often mistakenly put forth religious practices out of perplexity or of disregard for the law, many parents also do not understand the role of religion in the public classroom. The majority of this confusion manifests itself in the accusation of the teaching of secular humanism in the classroom and the consequent desire for equal incorporation of their religion(s). The first reason that parents believe this charge to be justified is because of widespread acknowledgement of secular humanism as a religion. In the case of *Torcaso v. Watkins* (367 U.S. 373, 1961), the Court stated that “among religions in this country which do not teach what would generally be considered a belief in the existence of God are Buddhism, Taoism, Ethical Culture, Secular Humanism, and others” (qtd. in Oldham 130). Since then, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals stated “without explanation” that “secular humanism may be a

religion” (McCarthy 481). Moreover, humanists themselves define it to be a religion. In *Humanist Sermons*, a book published in 1927, a quote by humanist E. Stanton Hodgins implies this common understanding: “This nation thus committed its life to the humanistic position long before such a faith was thought of as a religion” (qtd. in Noebel, Baldwin, and Bywater 31). Furthermore, *A Humanist Manifesto*, a formal statement of secular humanist beliefs, consistently regards humanism to be a religion. It first states that “the time has come for widespread recognition of the radical changes in religious beliefs. . . . In every field of human activity, the vital movement is now in the direction of candid and explicit humanism . . . religious humanism.” In speaking of secular humanism, it declares that “to establish such a religion is a major necessity of the present” (qtd. in Noebel et al. 45, 46).

As secular humanism is almost universally regarded to be a religion, it is also a nontheistic religion: another stepping stone in approaching the accusers’ claim. Generally, “secular humanists do not believe in the supernatural, and theologically they are nontheistic, ‘often considering themselves agnostics.’ They are skeptics, eschew supposed absolutes, and generally believe ‘that ethics should be relative to human consequences’” (McCarthy 469). John H. Dietrich, a Unitarian minister who signed *A Humanist Manifesto*, said that “humanism thinks of religion as something very different and far deeper than any belief in God,” namely speaking of the belief in human potential (qtd. in Noebel et al. 44). Whereas we are still not yet examining why some believe secular humanism pervades public schools, this fact is important to keep in mind. From the beginning of the public school system, the trend in “secularizing” has been to abolish any acknowledgment of God or any supernatural Deity. When schools decreed times of prayer (by definition directed to some god), the Court forbade it. When they tried to teach that God created the heavens and the earth, the Court found it unconstitutional. When schools posted

the Ten Commandments – recorded in the Bible as spoken to Moses from God – they were ordered to be taken down. Since formally stated in 1931, the courts have basically held that “the essence of religion is belief in a relation to God involving duties superior to those arising from any human relation” (*United States v. MacIntosh*, 283 U.S. 605, 633-634). The Supreme Being criterion was apparently annulled after *Everson v. Board of Education* in 1947 (330 U.S. 1), with “no longer [a] difference between believers and non-believers in the eyes of the Court concerning Establishment Clause cases,” but non-believers’ views are often less intrusive and, therefore, more inconspicuous (qtd. in Oldham 129). Because humanist beliefs rest in man rather than God, their teachings are more difficult to detect than those promoting the worship of a supernatural being.

While people argue that the teachings of secular humanist views are more easily overlooked because of their nontheistic nature, these reasons do not qualify as evidence of their existence in public schools. Rather, secular humanists themselves have led people to those assumptions. Declared in many humanists’ writings (some being very influential in educational theory) is the desire that public schools be the source in which to promote secular humanism. This plight is evident in the writings of self-described humanist minister Charles Francis Potter, who said that “education is thus a most powerful ally of Humanism, and every American public school is a school of Humanism. What can the theistic Sunday-schools, meeting for an hour once a week, and teaching only a fraction of the children, do to stem the tide of a five-day program of humanistic teaching?” (qtd. in Noebel et al. 38). John Dewey, signatory of *A Humanist Manifesto* and believed by some to be “the father of modern public education,” also often expressed this aim (Noebel et al. 17). He said in an essay entitled “Religion and Our Schools” that “we certainly cannot teach religion as an abstract essence. We have got to teach *something*

as religion, and that means practically *some* religion,” which he later equated with social unity when he said that “[America’s] schools serve best the cause of religion in serving the cause of social unification” (qtd. in Noebel et al. 20). He also states in his pedagogical creed that “it is the business of every one interested in education to insist upon the schools as the primary and most effective instrument of social progress and reform in order that society may be awakened to realize what the school stands for” and that “in this way the teacher always is the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God” (qtd. in Noebel et al. 18). Some people, therefore, see social unification and progress – previously given as goals for public education – as direct promoters of secular humanist tenets.

When people with opposing views see the devotion of secular humanists to advance their religion, they begin to search for proof of its existence in order to purge those teachings from schools, or in some cases, as justification for incorporating their own religion into the classroom. Those who want to rid religion in general and secular humanism in particular from public schools look to the law for help. Although the First Amendment was established earlier, the Court later stated more emphatically in *Everson v. Board of Education* that “no tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities or institutions, whatever they may be called, or whatever form they may adopt to teach or practice religion” (qtd. in Sorenson 297). If schools cannot exist without some form of theistic or nontheistic religious teaching, then they do not belong under public domain and funding. Others begin avidly scouring teaching materials and programs to find any trace of humanism. One of the most common results of this search, beginning in the late 1970s and early ’80s, is the protestation of textbooks (Jenkinson *Myths* 73). When parents find the presence of such subjects as self-improvement programs; anything concerning the occult, witchcraft, magic; sex education; drug

education; values clarification; moral education; and certain other topics, they protest to school boards and/or take the issues to court (Jenkinson *Myths* 71). Intensifying matters for these parents is the lack of any type of religious alternative to secular teachings of these topics and the “omission of references to religious history in the social studies curriculum” (McCarthy 473). In fact, most textbooks have been found to leave out the majority of historical fact regarding (theistic) religion (Nord 144). W.A Nord summarizes the thoughts of many parents in saying that “schools come perilously close to indoctrinating students by socializing them to accept, uncritically, some culturally contested (in this case secular) way of understanding the world rather than other ways (such as religious ways of making sense of the world); religious accounts are made to seem implausible” (qtd. in Scribner and Fusarelli 283). Also resulting from this search is the contention that “teacher preparation programs instill humanistic principles such as the philosophy of John Dewey, Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and others” (McCarthy 472). One man is said to have “traced the spread of humanism from John Dewey to Dewey’s disciples to teachers hired in public schools and the entire educational universe” (McCarthy 472). These allegations obviously have strong implications for public schools and teachers: if true, their existence under U.S. law is jeopardized.

In reaction to these claims, schools have acted in defense and/or retaliation. As part of the defense, a war of definitions has begun. Those favoring public education have argued that humanism, which may exist in schools, is broader than and different from secular humanism, which may be a religion. Secular humanism is apparently associated with the beliefs set forth in *Humanist Manifesto I* and *II*, while humanism “includes secularistic humanism, secular humanism, religious humanism, humanities humanism, and Christian humanism. Individuals who subscribe to any one of those philosophies may well argue that ‘humanism’ is not a religion

in and of itself” (Jenkinson *Search* 183). Also in defense, others argue that the secularity of schools equates with the neutrality required by law, not presupposing atheism or anti-religiosity (McCarthy 482). This argument comes in response to those who believe that “it is no more neutral to favor the secular over the religious than it is to favor the religious over the secular” and that “neutrality and secularism are not the same thing” (qtd. in Glanzer 220). Some take the retaliating measure of disallowing all things religious that might normally be permissible. Students have been denied the right to write a research paper on “The Life of Jesus Christ” or to include him in a portion of a valedictorian speech, even though other topics were permitted – “Spiritualism,” “Reincarnation,” and “Magic throughout History” in the case of the research paper (Glanzer 220). One elementary student was even prohibited the right to give friends invitations to a church-sponsored Halloween alternative party (Glanzer 220). These actions have possibly been taken out of fear that religious beliefs will be imposed upon people. As said by Gail Sorenson, “the greatest threat to education in the next century comes [. . .] from the vocal minority who would uncritically impose a narrow worldview on American schoolchildren – indeed from those who themselves would readily oppose ‘educating for intelligent belief or unbelief’” (300). As words such as these fire shots to the other side, more are shot back, creating a battle zone with children and their education placed in the middle, receiving the bulk of the blow.

Besides the disruption caused in communities and schools by flying accusations, other problems and questions have emanated regarding the existence and method of teaching religion. Because secular schools were put under public funding and state law, no one is quite sure if or how religion should be addressed in the classroom. On the one hand, many people believe that religion must be taught because of its importance to life, history, and culture. Some state that

“removing religious activities or references from the schools means neglecting the nation’s most fundamental traditions and their influence on our institutions” (McCarthy 73). This negligence can lead to ignorance at best and a false worldview at worst. Charles Haynes has noted that the “omission of discussion about religious and philosophical roots of developments in history, economics, literature, and other subjects gives students the false impression that only nonreligious ways of seeing the world are valid” (*Beyond* 32). But even if a consensus arises that students should learn about religion, the question remains of how to do so. Not only would educators want to avoid stepping over the legal line, but a difficulty or even impossibility exists in trying to objectively teach about multiple religions in a manner that wholly explains each religion. One Christian asks whether “[it is] objective to teach the Bible as literature rather than scripture, as our courts have indicated is acceptable? We think not. For most Christians, the Bible is not well described as literature; it is scripture or the Word of God, and these terms carry all kinds of theological baggage that nonbelievers find unacceptable” (Baer and Carper 35). Even though this is only one example, similar arguments can be drawn from attempting to teach about any religion.

While many believe that the teaching of religion should be part of the curriculum, most educators and schools leave it out. This could partly be because textbooks lack any useful information to use in the classroom. In the various studies done of textbooks, the only visible mention of religion has been short sections in history books about Native Americans and Puritans (Haynes *Seeking* 32). The emptiness of textbooks in regard to religion can be evidence to the other reason that religion is not taught: fear. Many teachers and curriculum writers worry that legal boundaries will be crossed, or that parents will begin to complain (Jenkinson *Search* 186). A teacher can easily eradicate these trepidations by simply leaving out any mention of or

reference to religion. Religion has, therefore, become a taboo subject in the classroom, leading to the remarks that students miss out on important information about our nation's history and the role it plays in many people's lives. In this case, students would receive more education in an institution that is not guarded by the state.

Although schools seem totally void of religion because of the reluctance of religious discussion on behalf of educators, schools ironically cannot be rid of religious influences. This is true mainly because no agreement exists on what "religion" actually means. One broad view of the term defines religion as philosophy (Waldron). Others say that "science and religion are indistinguishable in approaches to [ultimate] matters" (Frohock). Some even say that "any definition of religion must be incomplete and in some way culturally limited" because of a lack of distinction in many cultures between religion and other experiences (Frohock). If this is the case, then no one really knows what kinds of religions are being taught through different philosophies and scientific theories. The ones showing belief in a supernatural Deity seem obvious to avoid, but even after the issuance in 1995 of the U.S. Department of Education's guidelines on "Religious Expressions in Public Schools," people have found problems with adults proselytizing in schools and music programs that involve the performance of religious music, sometimes even in church buildings (Doerr 224). In regard to the teaching of secular humanism, Judge Hand began in *Smith v. Board of Commissioners* (655 F. Supp. 939) by "tracing the influence of John Dewey and his philosophy of secular humanism on the public education system. Relying on Dewey's works and the clearly moral values and philosophy that Dewey's works teach, Hand stated that 'the American system is that we do not teach religion in public schools, yet we teach Dewey's philosophy, and that is a religion'" (Oldham 145). As

Judge Hand could be correct, schools are subtly giving students biased teaching, influencing them toward a secular humanist viewpoint.

Not only can schools not be entirely void of some sort of religious teachings or influences, but in the effort to make them so, many questions have arisen concerning how to teach morality in the public school. As mentioned previously, one of the goals of public education was and is to create individuals with strong moral character (i.e. to improve the nation by producing upright citizens). More recently, some have tried to separate moral or character education from religion, but that has not always been the case (Wright 17). Horace Mann believed that by the common school, each student should learn “common” Christian values through the reading of the Bible without comment (Wright 18). This idea, however, was quite faulted as it involved religion in the public schools. Up through the mid-1900s schools still taught a generalized Christianity as moral education, normally by inculcating the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule (Wright 19). By the 1950s this idea was broadened by teaching just the Golden Rule, as based on “Judeo-Christian tradition” (Wright 19). This idea of common school morality ended, though, after the cases in 1962 and 1963 of *Engle v. Vitale*, *Murray v. Curlett*, and *Abington v. Schempp* overruled state-required prayer and Bible reading. Religion became taboo, and the attempt ever since has been to establish a sort of “objective” Character education (Wright 20).

Trying to fulfill this goal, however, has proven to be very difficult and in conflict with the goals set forth for public education. For example, some people argue that morals and values cannot be taught without a religious basis or a reference to God. Any attempt to do so, they say, is meaningless and fruitless, and even “inevitably restricts the pupil’s moral growth” (qtd. in McCarthy 73). The belief that follows is that schools should, therefore, leave out moral

education altogether. In this case, public schools are forced to ignore a primary reason for existing in the first place. Many people contend, contrarily, that leaving out the teaching of morals prohibits the achievement of another principle set at the onset of public schools: to enhance social conditions by preventing crime. They argue that “[t]o isolate teaching from values (perhaps more precisely, from the source[s] of given values), [. . .], is to create a moral vacuum in the classroom, one they allege has contributed to an increase in social dilemmas such as crime, delinquency, family instability, and more” (McCarthy 73). Schools are, therefore, left with a choice in which neither decision can totally fulfill the goals of public education. They can try to teach morality in a legally permissible way – without God and religion – that might not be effective in creating a morally upright population, or they can abdicate both goals by discarding moral education altogether. In either case, the public school fails to fulfill its duties – jobs that could be performed without question by private schools.

The incapability of the public school system to succeed in these areas is discernable from studying its founding. These public schools were begun on the philosophy that schools could act as the government’s instrument to improve society in the way the government saw fit. The founders of public education believed that schools could provide a means for man’s perfectibility – an ideology absolutely contrary to that which first began the tradition of a community-funded institution. The government then chose secular schools to do the job, as publicly-funded religious schools were at first unappealing and then prohibited by the Constitution. Thus, in order to take advantage of tuition-free schooling (as many Americans are financially obligated to do), people are forced to have a secular education, even if they most desire a religious one. Furthermore, as they try to receive that education, they are cheated. They cannot openly hear about religion in the classroom or read about it in textbooks – even the important role it has had

in American history. They cannot learn about morality in any way influenced by religion, at least one with belief in a supernatural being. Students can, however, be influenced by teachings of religious belief in man, if such teachings are in fact religious. Even if not, students can be caught in battles attempting to prove that they are. In all cases, the public school system falls short of what a private one could have attained. All Americans could be putting their school tax money toward their school of choice – religious or secular. Those schools could then teach religion and morality as they wish, without fear of tyrannical government intervention – one ideal of a democracy. Court cases and costs would be avoided, as the Establishment clause has no bearing over private teaching institutions. If the government wanted to create a more perfect society, it should have left education in the hands of the people.

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